

The Epiphany 2008

(Matthew 2:1-12)

We celebrate the **Epiphany**.

“Epiphany” means *manifestation*.

We celebrate God incarnate, the Word made flesh,
made manifest to the Gentiles (i.e. the whole world, beyond the Jewish community)
– *in the persons of the Magi*.

How interesting: we are talking about *three* persons, not literally the whole world.

There was this mysterious event, which the Christian tradition reads more deeply.

The Magi represent the Gentile world,

and, apparently, the testimony of these three will bear weight, and suffice.

- God always proceeds in intimate (person-to person) fashion.
- God likes to make use of instruments.

As we observe at Christmas, and everywhere in Jesus’ life:

the things of God are never with a bang.

Now, notice an order in revelation (which is continued throughout Christ’s ministry),
an order always respectful of God’s mysterious covenant with His people.

The revelation is first to the Jews.

There were first the shepherds, simple and lowly,
who were Jews.

There were second the Magi, these other figures, wise and powerful,
who represent the learned pagan world.

The two revelations occur by means of/imply an attraction.

The Magi were *drawn*, as were the shepherds.

There is no commandment; only an *attraction*.

Can we perhaps say that the shepherds and the Magi
typify the two-fold attraction of God?

What is the *two-fold* attraction? It is the attraction of *heart* and *mind*.

God draws heart and mind (the order of which depends on the individual).

God does so because He is *love* and *light*, and He wishes to embrace all that we are.

Note that God reaches *both*:

- the heart first, through which the mind (the shepherds)
- the mind first, through which the heart (the Magi)

The Magi, whose exact identity is difficult to specify, but who are traditionally portrayed as coming in full regalia, with gifts, and with all their learnedness, seem to come rather moved in their intellect (no one told them anything: only a star).

There is an obscure verse from the Old Testament (Isaiah 60:3), which may prophetically apply to the Magi:

“The Gentiles shall walk in the light, and kings in the brightness of your rising.”

And the Church applies Psalm 71:10 to them:

"The kings of Tharsis and the islands shall offer presents;
the kings of the Arabians and of Saba shall bring him gifts:
and all the kings of the earth shall adore him"

From the seventh century, we find names attributed to them:

Gaspar, Melchior, Balthasar (sounds like “Lord of the Rings”!).

But they remain mysterious figures.

What is certain is that they come and they find!

They come and they find *God enfleshed* (!!?)

What are they expecting?

It is beautiful when one realizes that they have necessarily been *given* a gift from Christ, *before even seeing him*: **faith**.

Faith is a gift, a gift which entails a very subtle attraction to God.

Faith enables us to “look” beyond appearances, to discern mystery from above.

Consequently, without faith, the Magi

- would probably not have come
- would have been gravely disappointed

Indeed, St. John Chrysostom says (4th century):

If the Magi had come in search of an earthly king,
they would have been disconcerted at finding
that they had taken the trouble to come such a long way for nothing.
Consequently, they would have neither adored nor offered gifts.
But since they sought a heavenly King,
though they found Him in no signs of royal pre-eminence,
yet, content with the testimony of a star alone, they adored.

They come and they find.

With the eyes of the body they see a fragile infant.

With the eyes of faith they see God.

It is very much like us regarding the Eucharist.

With the eyes of the body we see plain bread

(vulnerable analogously to a new-born;
indeed, e.g.: Christ in the Eucharist will not resist desecration,
as the new-born Christ would not have resisted being physically harmed...)

Without faith, we will probably not come, and will certainly be disappointed.’

With the “eyes of faith” we see God.

To “see” God is to *know deep inside* (without seeing with the eyes of the body).

The Magi come and find.

They find what they were seeking in faith,
and they are filled with sublime joy.

In their wonder and joy, they pay homage.

As part of their homage, they offer gifts in keeping with the reality of this child,
which we grasp, once again, in faith.

- **gold** = royalty (luminous luster...)
- **frankincense** = divinity (rises when burned for prayer...)
- **myrrh** = sacrificial lamb (used in embalming corpses...)

As we sing in “We Three Kings”,

“Glorious now, behold him, King and God and Sacrifice”

More things will later be revealed about the Christ.

But these are important as the initial revelation involving the Magi.

- He is the King of Kings, who rules with true justice and mercy
- He is indeed God.
- He is the One will share all that He is in supreme fashion in the giving of His life.

Today, perhaps there is a grace to discover more intimately/deeply

God incarnate in order that we be

- more mercifully and luminously governed
- joined to divinity
- given His life

Let us be mercifully led and illuminated.

Let us be divinized.

Let us be re-born.

Whenever we celebrate anything of the mystery of God, of the mystery of the God-man,
we also celebrate ourselves.

Not that we are God, but that God gives us *everything*, God shares/opens His mystery.

We celebrate our deepest reality: children of God,

and, in celebrating, it becomes more deeply our reality.